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AN EARNEST EXHORTATION TO THE RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE OF GOOD-FRIDAY.

IN A

LETTER

TO THE

INHABITANTS OF LAMBETH PARISH.

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RECTOR of the said PARISH.
Now LORD BISHOP of CHESTER.

THE SECOND EDITION.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following Letter was, as its title imports, originally intended for the use of the Author's Parishioners at Lambeth, to whom a great part of the first impression was given away. The remaining copies were, it seems, disposed of in a few days: and it is in consequence of very earnest and repeated solicitations from various quarters, that a new edition of it is now offered to the public at large. The Author sincerely wishes that by being more widely dispersed it may become more useful, and produce the desired effect. The favourable attention which has been already paid to it inclines him to hope that in some degree it will. He has reason at least to think that there are great numbers both in town and country who are very desirous to revive the serious and devout observance of Good-Friday; and whether this disposition might not be further encouraged and more generally diffused by an injunction from proper authority, similar to that mentioned p. 29 *of this Letter, he submits to the consideration of those who are much better judges of such a measure than himself.*

FEB. 5. 1777.

AN EARNEST

EXHORTATION, &c.

My very good Friends and Pariſhioners,

THE little regard that has for ſome years paſt been paid in ſeveral parts of this kingdom to that holy day, which we diſtinguiſh by the name of GOOD-FRIDAY, has given great concern to many ſerious Perſons, and has more than once drawn ſevere animadverſions on the Church of England and its governors in the public papers. But theſe cenſures (like moſt others which come through ſuch channels) are very unjuſtly applied. The blame reſts not on the Clergy. The Church requires a very ſolemn obſervance of the day; its Miniſters ſet the example of doing *their* duty, but they are followed by much ſmaller numbers of their People than might naturally be expected. It is true, were the primitive diſcipline reſtored, which ſome have with no little vehemence demanded, it

might poſſibly remedy this evil. But they who are moſt clamorous for the revival of that diſcipline, would perhaps be the firſt to complain of it, and to repreſent the remedy as worſe than the diſeaſe. It is certain, at leaſt, that theſe are not the times for any extraordinary exertions of power either civil or eccleſiaſtical; and although ſomething might perhaps be done in the preſent caſe by the judicious interpoſition of lawful authority, yet it is from the more perſuaſive methods of admonition, exhortation, and example, that we muſt chiefly expect any material change for the better. Sincerely deſirous of contributing all in my power towards ſo good a work, I could not forbear addreſſing myſelf to you, my brethren, on this ſubject; not becauſe the neglect of Good-Friday is more obſervable here than elſewhere, but becauſe it is with you I am more particularly concerned, and becauſe I can truly ſay, that your welfare, both temporal and ſpiritual, is, and ever has been, ſince I firſt came amongſt you, an object which I have had ſincerely at heart. It is with pleaſure I obſerve that my labours have not been wholly unſucceſsful; and that your own good diſpoſitions, aſſiſted by Divine Grace, have in many inſtances effectually ſeconded my weak endeavours for your ſervice. Your attendance, particularly, on public worſhip, is, in general,

neral, exemplary, and your behaviour in it ſerious and devout. It were greatly to be wiſhed that the ſame deep ſenſe of religion, which ſeems to inſpire you on the Lord's Day, was equally ſtrong in you on Good-Friday. For although there is, I believe, full as much attention paid to that day in this Pariſh as in any other, yet there is in all, I fear, much leſs than there ought to be. If on that anniverſary of our Lord's crucifixion, a ſtranger were to arrive in the capital or its neighbourhood, from a remote part of the world, he could not have the leaſt imagination that it was ſet apart by authority as a day of public faſting, humiliation, and prayer; and that it was originally diſtinguiſhed by an event more aſtoniſhing in its nature, and more important in its conſequences to the whole race of mankind, than any that had ever happened from the creation of the world to this moment: an event which ſhook the whole frame of nature, which rent the rocks, cauſed the earth to quake, and the graves to open and give back their dead *(a)*. Of all this he would ſcarce be able to diſcover any traces or memorials amongſt us. He would ſee every kind of trade and traffic going on as uſual; the ſtreets crowded with people, the roads lined with carriages and travellers, the fields full of labourers, and the ſame face of

(*a*) Matth. xxvii. 51, 52.

buſineſs and buſtle, the ſame air of gaiety and diſſipation as at any other time. Here and there indeed, he might perhaps perceive a few pious people reſorting to church. He might alſo perchance diſcover a ſolitary ſhop or two, half open and half ſhut up, as if the owner was half Heathen and half Chriſtian; as if he had ſome little miſgivings of mind that he was doing wrong, and yet could not for his life ſummon up courage and religion enough to do what is right: ſo he goes ſtumbling on between both, *halting*, like the Jews before him, *between two opinions (b)*, and trying hard to *ſerve two maſters*, *God* and *Mammon (c)* at the ſame time.

To ſee the generality of people thus perfectly inattentive to the duties of that day, when the eternal Son of God hung agonizing on the croſs for their ſakes, muſt ſurely excite in every pious mind the moſt painful and melancholy reflections. To what cauſe ſhall we aſcribe this ſtrange inſenſibility, this want of all tender feeling and all grateful ſentiment for the greateſt and moſt ſubſtantial act of kindneſs that ever was conferred on any human being? It muſt be owing undoubtedly to one of theſe two cauſes; either to a total diſbelief of the Chriſtian revelation; or elſe merely to the want of at-

(*b*) 1 Kings xviii. 21. (*c*) Matth. vi. 24.

tending

tending properly to the ineſtimable advantages we derive from the ſufferings and death of Chriſt.—With the firſt of theſe cauſes I have at preſent no concern. It is not to Infidels I am now addreſſing myſelf, but to Chriſtians; under which denomination I am willing to believe that the whole of this Pariſh may be comprehended. You have not yet, I hope, profited ſo much by your vicinity to the metropolis, as to have imported all thoſe wretched productions of modern philoſophy, which in various ſhapes and ſizes, under the name of eſſays, letters, novels, hiſtories, from the bulky quarto down to the meager pamphlet, are every day ſcattering the ſpawn of irreligion on the other ſide of the Thames *(d)*. You have not, I am perſuaded, advanced near ſo far as this in the faſhionable refinements of this poliſhed age. Your principles are ſtill uncorrupted; your faith in the Goſpel is ſtill firm and unſhaken: but you have not perhaps ſufficiently reflected on the nature and value of that Redemption, which Chriſt purchaſed for you on the croſs; and conſequently think but ightly of the day which is meant to commemorate

(*d*) One of the beſt preſervatives againſt the infection of theſe pernicious writings, as well as one of the fineſt and moſt animated compoſitions I have lately ſeen, is a little piece, entitled, *A Moral Demonſtration of the Truth of the Chriſtian Religion*; originally written by Biſhop Jeremy Taylor, republiſhed a few years ſince by Biſhop Hurd, and ſold by Cadell in the Strand.

that unſpeakable act of mercy. To correct this error therefore, and to inſpire you with juſt notions of your duty in this reſpect, I ſhall, in as conciſe and as clear a manner as I can, explain to you the reaſon and the effect of thoſe ſufferings which our Redeemer was graciouſly pleaſed, on our account, to undergo upon the croſs.

We all know and feel that we are weak, corrupt, and ſinful creatures. We find in ourſelves ſuch a natural and innate propenſity to what is wrong, and ſuch a backwardneſs and indiſpoſition, in many inſtances, to do what is right, that we cannot but conclude, (what Scripture aſſures us is true) that the human frame has undergone ſome great ſhock, and contracted ſome very fatal diſorder, ſince it firſt came out of the hands of its wiſe and benevolent Author. We perceive ourſelves incapable of pleaſing a God of infinite purity and holineſs, without ſome further help than nature can give us, and without greater indulgences than we have any title to expect. Every thinking man muſt be ſenſible, that after all his endeavours, and the very utmoſt he can do, he is ſtill not only an unprofitable, but too often an ungrateful and diſobedient ſervant. His paſſions frequently hurry him into the moſt heinous crimes, and theſe ſometimes grow into habits, which he finds

it

it extremely difficult to ſubdue. Or if by ſome uncommon effort he does reſcue himſelf from this ſlavery, yet how ſhall he waſh away the ſtain that ſin has left in his ſoul? how ſhall he appeaſe the anger and regain the favour of his offended Maker? "By repenting," you will perhaps ſay, "and "amending his life." This is undoubtedly the beſt thing he can do, and what every ſinner is bound to do. But there is no reaſon to believe that repentance and reformation alone will be ſufficient to avert the puniſhment due to paſt tranſgreſſions. Repenting is only being ſorry for what has been done amiſs. But that does not *undo* it; it does not put us in the ſame ſtate as if we had never done it. Reformation of life is doing right for the future; but that can no more make amends for having acted wrong before, than forbearing to contract new debts can pay off the old. It is indeed probable that repentance and amendment will be accepted favourably by our Maker; but the ſinner has no good ground, either from reaſon or experience, to think that they will be ſufficient to obtain pardon, much leſs reward, without ſomething elſe to aſſiſt and act in conjunction with them. He ſees every day, that the bittereſt ſorrow, and the ſincereſt reformation, will not reſtore the credit, the fortune, the health, the ſtrength, that his vices have deſtroyed; and why

then

then ſhould he ſuppoſe that they will ſave him from puniſhment in the next world, when they cannot do it even in this? The natural apprehenſions of mankind are repugnant to ſuch an idea. The Heathens themſelves never imagined that repentance and reformation were an adequate atonement for ſin. They made uſe of animal ſacrifices to appeaſe their offended gods; an expedient of ſo ſingular, ſo unpleaſant, and ſo expenſive a nature, that they would never have had recourſe to it, had they not thought ſuch an expiation abſolutely neceſſary; had they not been perſuaded, that after all they could do themſelves, ſomething muſt be done or ſuffered by ſome other Being, before they could be reſtored to the condition they were in before they forfeited their innocence. What reaſon, then, can *we* have to think otherwiſe? The goodneſs of God does indeed give us ground to hope that he will ſome way or other ſhow mercy to his wretched creatures; but his juſtice and his holineſs give equal cauſe to think that he will aſſert his authority, and ſupport his laws, by the puniſhment of thoſe who tranſgreſs them. How then ſhall we reconcile theſe two ſeemingly inconſiſtent expectations? What mode of treatment can we ſuppoſe it poſſible for the Almighty to adopt towards the human race, which ſhall at once manifeſt his abhorrence of ſin, and his tenderneſs for the ſinner, ſhall releaſe

offenders

offenders from that heavy puniſhment which their diſobedience merits, without expoſing his authority to contempt, or giving others encouragement to hope that they may inſult his laws with impunity? Nothing leſs than infinite wiſdom could ſtrike out an expedient like this; and infinite wiſdom did accordingly deviſe the following gracious method of giving ſalvation to mankind. At the propereſt time for ſuch an interpoſition, God thought fit to ſend his own Son into the world, who took our nature upon him; and, after teaching a moſt pure and holy religion, of which his own life was a perfect example, he voluntarily ſubmitted to a cruel and ignominious death upon the croſs; which our Maker was pleaſed to conſider as an atonement and ſatisfaction made to his juſtice for the ſins of all mankind, and to accept it in lieu of that puniſhment which they had juſtly incurred at his hands. Thus *did Mercy and* Juſtice *meet together, Righteouſneſs and Peace did kiſs each other (e).* For the ſake of that ſpotleſs ſacrifice offered up for us by Chriſt our High-prieſt, (to which the union of his divine nature with the human gave unſpeakable value) God has promiſed to beſtow on all who, in proportion to their means of knowledge, believe in his bleſſed Son, and repenting of their paſt faults, endeavour

(e) Pſalm lxxxv. 10.

faithfully

faithfully to obey him, pardon, grace, and everlaſting life.

This is that moſt important doctrine of ATONEMENT, which is the baſis of all our hopes, the chief corner-ſtone of the whole Chriſtian ſyſtem, the great leading principle which runs through all the ſacred writings, and animates and ennobles almoſt every part of our Liturgy (*f*). If you aſk what authority there is for aſcribing ſo much efficacy to the death of Chriſt; I anſwer, the very higheſt, — the plain, expreſs, and poſitive declarations of Holy Writ, ſuch as it is impoſſible, without

(*f*) Eſpecially *The Communion Office*, which is entirely founded on this doctrine as here explained; and the following prayer more particularly expreſſes it in ſo fine a ſtrain of true Chriſtian piety, that I could not forbear tranſcribing and recommending it to the reader's notice, as comprehending in a ſhort compaſs the ſenſe both of Scripture and of our Church on this great article of our Faith.

" O Lord and heavenly Father, we thy humble ſervants en-
" tirely deſire thy fatherly goodneſs mercifully to accept this our
" ſacrifice of praiſe and thankſgiving; moſt humbly beſeeching
" thee to grant that by the merits and death of thy Son Jeſus
" Chriſt, and through faith in his blood, we and all thy whole
" Church may obtain remiſſion of our ſins, and all other benefits
" of his Paſſion. And here we offer and preſent unto thee, O
" Lord, ourſelves, our ſouls, and bodies, to be a reaſonable,
" holy, and lively ſacrifice unto thee; humbly beſeeching thee
" that

without violating all the common rules of interpretation, to wreſt to any other meaning. *Search the Scriptures*, yourſelves, I beſeech you, and ſee whether theſe things are not ſo. See whether they do not tell you that *Chriſt was wounded for our tranſgreſſions and bruiſed for our iniquities*; that *the chaſtiſements of our peace were upon him*, and that *by his ſtripes we are healed* (*g*). That *the Lord laid on him the iniquities of us all* (*h*). That *for our tranſgreſſions he was ſtricken* (*i*), *and his ſoul made an offering for ſin* (*k*). This is the language of the prophets many hundred years before our Saviour came into the world; which ſhows that his death was neither accidental, nor merely the natural conſequence of his boldneſs in reproving the reigning vices of the age, but was *predetermined* long before, and was *intended* to be a propitiatory ſacrifice, a vicarious

" that all we who are partakers of this holy communion, may " be fulfilled with thy grace and heavenly Benediction. And " although we be unworthy, through our manifold ſins, to offer " unto thee any ſacrifice, yet we beſeech thee to accept this our " bounden duty and ſervice, not weighing our merits, but par- " doning our offences, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord; by whom, " and with whom, in the unity of the Holy Ghoſt, all honour " and glory be unto thee, O Father Almighty, world without " end." [*Collect after receiving.*]

(*g*) Iſaiah liii. 5. (*h*) Iſaiah liii. 6.
(*i*) Iſaiah liii. 8. (*k*) Iſaiah liii. 10.

puniſhment

puniſhment for the ſins of all mankind. In perfect conſonance with this idea, the ſacred writers of the New Teſtament tell us, that *the Son of man came to give his life a ranſom for many* (*l*). That *he is the Lamb of God, which taketh away the ſin of the world* (*m*). That *God ſet him forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood* (*n*). *Chriſt hath loved us*, ſays St. Paul, *and hath given himſelf for us, an offering and a ſacrifice to God* (*o*). *Now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away ſin by the ſacrifice of himſelf* (*p*). *He was once offered to bear the ſins of many* (*q*). *He hath once ſuffered for ſins, the juſt for the unjuſt, that he might bring us to God* (*r*). *He gave himſelf a ranſom for all* (*s*), *that he might redeem us from all iniquity* (*t*). And the whole New Teſtament declares, that we are *redeemed by him, purchaſed and bought with the price of his blood* (*u*).

Theſe, my brethren, are the words of Scripture; and if words have any meaning at all, theſe can mean nothing elſe, than that Chriſt came into the world *on purpoſe* to ſuffer death upon the croſs for

(*l*) Matth. xx. 28. (*m*) John i. 29.
(*n*) Romans iii. 25. (*o*) Epheſ. v. 2.
(*p*) Heb. ix. 28. (*q*) Heb. ix. 28.
(*r*) 1 Pet. iii. 18. (*s*) 1 Tim. ii. 6.
(*t*) Titus ii. 14. (*u*) Acts xx. 28. 1 Cor. vi. 20. 1 Pet. i. 18, 19. 2 Pet. ii. 1. Rev. v. 9.

our

our redemption, and that He made there a "full, "perfect, and ſufficient ſacrifice, oblation, and ſa- "tisfaction for the ſins of the whole world (*x*)." This I am ſure is the ſenſe, in which every plain man muſt underſtand the paſſages above quoted: and if this ſenſe can by any ingenious device of criticiſm, be conveyed away, and a totally different one ſlipped into its place; it would, I apprehend, be no difficult matter by the very ſame dexterity of interpretation to explain away the truth of every doctrine, and the obligation of every precept that is to be found in the Goſpel (*y*).

If ſuch then are the benefits we derive from the death of our bleſſed Lord; if in his blood our guilt is waſhed away; if through his merits, not our own, (on the conditions of repentance, faith, and amendment) we obtain the remiſſion of our ſins and the

(*x*) Prayer of conſecration in the Communion Office.

(*y*) It was a ſingular ſatisfaction to me to find Mr. SOAME JENYNS a ſtrenuous advocate for the great Doctrine of Atonement, in his *View of the internal Evidence of the Chriſtian Religion*. If that very ingenious and agreeable Writer would but take the trouble of reconſidering and retouching a few paſſages of his book, (in which, for want of a little cloſer attention, the true ſpirit of the Goſpel, and the true meaning of the ſacred writers ſeem to have eſcaped his uſual penetration) it would add greatly to the value of his work, and eſtabliſh on the firmeſt grounds that high reputation which, on account of its general good tendency, it has already ſo juſtly acquired.

inheritance

inheritance of everlaſting life; conſider, I beſeech you, what kind of return ſuch invaluable mercies demand; conſider whether that very day, on which theſe mercies were conveyed to you, ought in reaſon, in juſtice, in gratitude, in common decency, to be treated in the manner it too commonly is. *I ſpeak as to wiſe men, judge ye what I ſay* (z), and determine for yourſelves. *Greater love*, you muſt allow, *hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends* (a). Suppoſe then for a moment, that ſome friend of your own had actually done this for you; that, when your life was forfeited by ſome crime againſt the ſtate, he had voluntarily ſubſtituted himſelf in your place, and ſuffered the puniſhment incurred by your offence: what would be your feelings, what would be your behaviour on this occaſion? Would you ſuffer the annual return of that day on which your friend died for you, to paſs unheeded, undiſtinguiſhed, unhallowed by a ſingle tear or ſigh, by a ſingle reflection on that moſt tranſcendant act of kindneſs, to which you owed your very exiſtence? There is not a man amongſt you that would not think himſelf injured and inſulted by ſuch a ſuſpicion. Yet this ſuppoſed act of

(z) 1 Cor. x. 15.

(a) John xv. 13.

kindneſs (great as it undoubtedly is) falls far below what you have actually experienced from the love of your Redeemer. It was not when you were his *friends*, but when you were his *enemies* (*b*), that he ſacrificed his life for you. *For God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were ſinners, Chriſt died for us* (*c*). We believe, or profeſs to believe, that this is true; and yet what is our behaviour in conſequence of it? Why on the anniverſary of the day when it is ſuppoſed to have happened, too many of us, alas! are as eaſy and unconcerned, as much devoted to buſineſs or to pleaſure, as if nothing in the world had happened with which we had the leaſt concern! Is this right, is this fitting; is it Chriſtian like, is it decent, is it creditable? Does it ſhow that veneration, love, and gratitude, which malefactors reprieved from death are wont to teſtify towards their benefactor and deliverer?

"How then," you will perhaps ſay, "would you have us obſerve this day?" In the manner certainly preſcribed by the Church; and in which it uſed anciently to be obſerved; with as much ſerioufneſs, ſolemnity, and devotion; with as abſolute a ceſſation of

(*b*) Romans v. 10.
(*c*) Romans v. 8.

all worldly buſineſs and pleaſure, as uſually takes place on Sunday. In this manner you celebrate Chriſtmas-day, and why then not Good-Friday? On the former of theſe your Redeemer was born, on the latter He was put to death; and is his Crucifixion, do you think, of leſs conſequence to you than his Nativity? Is it not, on the contrary, to the former of theſe events that the latter owes the greater part of its value? That he *who thought* it *not robbery to be equal with God* (*d*), *who was the very brightneſs of his Glory, and the expreſs image of his Perſon* (*e*), ſhould voluntarily diveſt himſelf of this ſplendour, and take upon him, not only the nature of man, but the form of a ſervant, was, it muſt be owned, a moſt ſurpriſing inſtance of condeſcenſion and kindneſs; but that he ſhould moreover, for our ſakes, ſubmit to the cruelleſt injuries and indignities, to the moſt ignominious and excruciating death; that he ſhould conſent *to bear our griefs and carry our ſorrows* (*f*), is ſurely a ſtill ſtronger and more extraordinary proof of his love and affection for mankind, and therefore certainly demands at leaſt an equal degree of veneration and thankfulneſs.

(*d*) Phil. ii. 6.
(*e*) Heb. i. 3.
(*f*) Iſ. iii. 4.

There

There is indeed one difference between the two days in queſtion, which may in ſome meaſure poſſibly account for the different regard which is ſhown to them. The Nativity of our Lord is a feſtival, the Crucifixion is a faſt, and we find ourſelves perhaps much better diſpoſed to rejoice than to weep, to indulge our appetites, than to reſtrain them. If this be really the caſe with any of us: if we are capable of being withheld from our duty by ſuch low, ſuch mean, ſuch ſenſual motives as theſe, it is, I am ſure, high time to extricate ourſelves from this unworthy thraldom, to break looſe from the dominion of ſenſe, *to keep our body under, and bring it into ſubjection (g)*, and put ourſelves under the direction of higher and better principles.

Could ye not watch with me one hour (h)? ſaid our Saviour to his drowſy diſciples: "Can ye not faſt "for me one day in the year?" may he now ſay to you. It is true, indeed, mere abſtinence from food, whether total or partial, is in itſelf no virtue, nor can it atone for the breach of any moral duty; and to ſuppoſe that it can, is a dangerous and deluſive ſuperſtition. But, on the other hand, to neglect it abſolutely, and deride it as a uſeleſs

(g) 1 Cor. ix. 27.
(h) Matth. xxvi. 40.

and ridiculous cuſtom, is preſumptuous and raſh *(i)*. Faſting is a very proper mark of internal ſorrow and contrition. It is only making uſe of a more emphatical kind of language to ſpeak our ſentiments; it is expreſſing them by actions inſtead of words. By inflicting this voluntary puniſhment on ourſelves, we plainly acknowledge that we are offenders, and that we take ſhame and grief to ourſelves for the faults we have committed. The mortification of one of our ſtrongeſt appetites is a very ſignificant way of ſaying, that we reſolve to repent, and to ſubdue *thoſe luſts which war againſt the ſoul (k)*. For this conflict we ſhall be better prepared by ſuch previous exerciſes of our ſtrength; and a ſuperiority eſtabliſhed over our deſires in one inſtance, facilitates it in all the reſt. Add to this, that the more we abſtain from ſenſual indulgences, the better are we diſpoſed for ſpiritual meditations. The body when overloaded with luxurious food *preſſeth down the ſoul, and weigheth down the mind that muſeth on many things (l)*.—For theſe reaſons, faſting has, in almoſt all ages and nations of the world, been

(*i*) See the nature, uſes, and abuſes of religious abſtinence, ſtated and explained by Archbiſhop Secker, with that accuracy, judgement, moderation, and good ſenſe, which ſo ſtrongly mark the writings of that incomparable Prelate.

Secker's Sermons, Vol. 5. S. 14. P. 305.

(*k*) 1 Pet. ii. 11. (*l*) Wiſdom ix. 15.

conſidered

conſidered as a very proper act of religious diſcipline. Amongſt the Jews it was very common, and on ſeveral ſolemn occaſions was required by their law. But being at length abuſed, like many other externals of their religion, to the purpoſes of hypocriſy and ſuperſtition, our Saviour ſeverely reproved their oſtentatious auſterities; and, leſt his diſciples ſhould be led to imitate them, did not give them any direct command to faſt. Yet to thoſe who voluntarily adopted this cuſtom from good intentions, he preſcribed rules for conducting themſelves properly, and promiſed them a reward *(m)*. He himſelf faſted forty days and forty nights. Theſe things plainly ſhow that he approved the practice, and that it was the abuſes of it only which he condemned. The Church of England does ſo likewiſe, and obſerves the ſame prudent moderation in this as in many other inſtances. It neither gives encouragement to idleneſs and diſſipation, by too great a number of Feſtivals, nor oppreſſes its members by a load of needleſs and ſuperſtitious auſterities. It recommends with great propriety ſome degree of ſelf-denial during the ſeaſon of Lent; and were that injunction better complied with than it ſeems to be, it would be found, I believe, highly conducive

(*m*) Matth. vi. 16. 18.

both to health of body and tranquillity of mind. But it leaves the obſervance of it to every man's own diſcretion, and inflicts no penalty for neglecting it. The Faſt on which the primitive Church ſeems to have laid the greateſt ſtreſs, and which till of late years has been uſually obſerved with great ſerioufneſs, isthat of GOOD-FRIDAY. And ſurely, if ever any reſtraint on our appetities and pleaſures can be proper, if ever it can be a reaſonable duty to "turn to the Lord with weeping, faſting, and praying" *(n)*, and to bewail our ſins with every inward ſentiment and every outward expreſſion of the deepeſt humiliation and contrition, it muſt be on that day, when, to deliver us from the power and the puniſhment of thoſe ſins, Chriſt Jeſus offered himſelf up as a ſacrifice on the croſs; when *he died for all, that they which live ſhould not henceforth live unto themſelves, but unto him which died for them, and roſe again (o)*. It would certainly be decent, and probably uſeful too, to make ſome little ſacrifice of our common indulgences on Good-Friday to him, who then made ſo great a one for us. They who cannot wholly omit their uſual refreſhments, may at leaſt delay them a little, or par-

(*n*) Commination in the Office for Aſh-Wedneſday.
(*o*) 2 Cor. v. 15.

take

take of them more ſparingly. This, one would think, muſt be conſiſtent with the tendereſt conſtitution and moſt delicate health. But if it ſhould in any caſe be found otherwiſe, *God will have mercy and not ſacrifice (p)*. Judge for yourſelves in this particular; judge fairly in your own caſe, and charitably in that of others. *Let not him that eateth deſpiſe him that eateth not; and let not him that eateth not judge him that eateth (q). For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteouſneſs and peace and joy in the Holy Ghoſt (r)*. Faſting was intended to diſengage the mind from ſenſual objects, to weaken the paſſions, to ſpiritualize the affections, to exalt and enliven devotion. If it does not anſwer theſe purpoſes; if, on the contrary, it be found to render us languid and faint, peeviſh and moroſe; if it blunts the edge and deadens the ſpirit of our religious exerciſes; it is no longer a duty to practiſe it; it becomes a duty to omit it.

But they who are incapable of complying with the injunctions of the Church in this reſpect, are certainly able, and ought to be doubly careful, to conform to them in all others. If men cannot faſt, they can pray; if they cannot abſtain from their or-

(p) Matth. ix. 13.
(q) Rom. xiv. 3.
(r) Rom. xiv. 17.

dinary food, they can abſtain at leaſt from their ordinary labours, cares, and amuſements; they can put this world and its concerns out of their minds, and give themſelves up to God; they can attend divine ſervice both parts of the day; they can dedicate the remainder of it to private meditation and prayer; they can examine into their paſt and preſent conduct; they can poſſeſs themſelves with a juſt ſenſe of their own natural weakneſs and depravity; of the infinite need they have of a mediator, a redeemer, a propitiation for their ſins; they can adore the goodneſs of God in providing, the goodneſs of Chriſt in conſenting to become, the very Sacrifice they ſo much wanted, the *Lamb ſlain* to expiate their guilt, to reſtore them to the favour of God, and render their beſt ſervices acceptable in his ſight.—For let them, let all the world know and acknowledge, with the deepeſt humility and gratitude; that *not by works of righteouſneſs which we have done, but according to his mercy God ſaved us (s)*; *and that it is by grace we are ſaved through faith, and that not of ourſelves, it is the gift of God (t)*.

It is indeed principally for the ſake of imprinting this moſt important truth ſtrongly and powerfully

(*s*) Titus iii. 5.
(*t*) Epheſ. ii. 8.

upon

upon your ſouls, ſo as to render it a conſtant and effectual principle of action, that I ſo much preſs upon you a due attention to the day which is particularly calculated to bring it home to your thoughts. Were it even, as ſome contend, nothing more than a mere ſpeculative doctrine; yet as it is, without diſpute, the great diſtinguiſhing character of the Chriſtian diſpenſation, the wall of partition between natural and revealed religion, the main foundation of all our hopes of pardon and acceptance hereafter, it would ſurely demand a moſt ſerious regard from us (*u*). But in fact it is far from being a matter of belief only; it has a direct and natural tendency to influence our practice; and they who reject it, or explain it away to nothing, do not ſeem to be aware that they are deſtroying one of the moſt efficacious motives to right conduct. For what can more clearly prove to us the odious nature of ſin, and inſpire us with a greater horror and deteſtation of it, than the conſideration, that nothing leſs than the blood of the Son of God himſelf could waſh away the ſtains of it; and that, without this, not even the

(*u*) This is the doctrine (ſays the excellent Biſhop Sherlock) which, together with the principles on which it is founded, and the conſequences naturally flowing from it, diſtinguiſhes the Chriſtian religion from all other religions whatever.

Sermons, Vol. iv. D. 3. p. 88.

(*x*) Luke xvii. 10.

ſincereſt

ſincereſt repentance and completeſt reformation that we are capable of, would be a ſufficient ſatisfaction to the violated laws and offended majeſty of Heaven? What an awful idea does this give us both of the ſeverity and the goodneſs of God! of that ſeverity to guilt, which becomes the righteous Governour of the univerſe; of that goodneſs to the criminal, which ſo well ſuits and ſo plainly ſpeaks the gracious Father of mankind! What infinite cauſe have we to be careful of offending ſo kind, yet ſo exact a Judge, "and to tremble at his juſtice, "even whilſt we are within the arms of his mercy!" What encouragement does it afford us to put out all our ſtrength, and ſtrain every nerve in the performance of our duty, when we know, that, though after all *we are unprofitable ſervants* (*x*); yet, unprofitable as we are, we ſhall be accepted for the ſake of our Redeemer's ſufferings! that our want of merit will be amply ſupplied by his merit; and our numberleſs failings and imperfections loſt in the plenitude of his all-ſufficient righteouſneſs! How powerfully, in fine, muſt it conſtrain us to every inſtance of duty and affection, both to our Maker and our Redeemer, when we call to mind thoſe wonderful marks of love diſplayed towards us by both

(*x*) Luke xvii. 12.

in the great work of our ſalvation! Perhaps we cannot ſee all the reaſons that made it neceſſary for Chriſt to die, that the world might live; but this at leaſt we are ſure of, that if Chriſt did really die, that the world might live, we are bound to him in the ſtricteſt bonds of gratitude and affection (*y*). That the eternal Son of God ſhould put himſelf in our ſtead, and interpoſe his own body as a living ſhield between our guilt and his Father's wrath, is ſuch a ſtupendous inſtance of friendſhip, as is not to be paralleled in the hiſtory of mankind.—*Lord! what is man, that thou art thus mindful of him, and the ſon of man that thou viſiteſt him* (*z*)! "And what is the natural effect of "ſuch kindneſs as this, but to bind us to God "and our Saviour by the tye of reciprocal affection, "and draw us to our duty by the cords of tender-"neſs and gratitude? Surely, if we are not utterly "loſt to all that is modeſt and ingenuous, tender "and apprehenſive in human nature, it will be "impoſſible for us to doat on thoſe ſins which "were the cauſe of our Saviour's ſufferings, the "thorns that gored his temples, the nails that "pierced his hands and feet; it will be impoſſible "for us to reſiſt thoſe endearing inſtances of our

(*y*) Sherlock.
(*z*) Pſalm viii. 4.

"Saviour's

" Saviour's love, which carry warmth and fervour
" enough with them to melt the moſt obdurate
" nature into thankfulneſs and obedience (*a*)."

You ſee then, my brethren, how many weighty reaſons there are for a religious obſervance of Good-Friday. It is a decent compliance with the ordinances of the Church; it is an open declaration, that you believe that moſt eſſential article of Chriſtian Faith, THE REDEMPTION OF MANKIND BY THE DEATH OF CHRIST JESUS ON THE CROSS; it is a becoming mark of thankfulneſs and gratitude for ſo invaluable a mercy; it affords a very proper opportunity of reviewing your paſt life; of confeſſing and lamenting the many ſins and follies you perceive in it with the utmoſt ſorrow and humiliation of ſoul; of intreating pardon through the merits of your Redeemer; and of pleading thoſe merits before God in the Holy Sacrament of the Lord's Supper; which being intended to commemorate the ſufferings of Chriſt, can never be more properly received than on the very day when thoſe ſufferings are ſuppoſed to have happened. A devout uſe of the Prayers, which you will find in the office for that ſolemnity, cannot fail to im-

(*a*) Scott's Chriſtian Life, ch. 7. ſect, 5. p. 137.

preſs

preſs upon your ſouls a deep ſenſe of the goodneſs both of God and of Chriſt in the great work of your Redemption, a ſincere contrition for your paſt offences, and a firm reſolution to be more careful of your future conduct.

It is on theſe grounds, it is from a real perſuaſion that the Croſs of Chriſt is the *Power of God unto Salvation*, and that far from being aſhamed of it, you ought to glory in it, as the grand ſource of all your comfort here and all your happineſs hereafter; it is, I ſay, from motives ſuch as theſe, that I have been induced to addreſs you on this occaſion. Hitherto, I am willing to perſuade myſelf, my exhortations have had ſome weight with you. Let them not loſe it, I intreat you, in the preſent inſtance. Let me have the ſatisfaction of obſerving the good effects of them at the approaching holy ſeaſon, and of ſeeing you the firſt amongſt your neighbours to revive the ancient religious veneration paid to the Crucifixion of our bleſſed Lord (*b*). Let your church be crowded on that day, both in the morning and

(*b*) Mr. Nelſon tells us, that in the year 1710 Good-Friday was required by authority to be kept as a day of devotion, and ſequeſtered from all worldly buſineſs; and that it was accordingly religiouſly obſerved throughout the whole city of London, by ſhutting up of ſhops, and attending the public aſſemblies.

Companion to Feſtivals and Faſts, &c. p. 484.

the

the afternoon. Let your ſhops be ſhut up as on Sundays and on Chriſtmas-day. Let your behaviour during the reſt of the day be ſerious and devout. Above all things, take care to ſhow your gratitude for your redemption, not only with your lips, but in your lives. In particular, let the mercies you have received from your Maker and your Redeemer incline you to every act of mercy, forgiveneſs, and forbearance towards your fellow-creatures. This argument is ſtated by St. John, with his uſual elegant brevity and ſimplicity: *Beloved, if God ſo loved us, we ought alſo to love one another* (*c*).—An inference ſo plain, ſo forcible, ſo affecting, it is impoſſible for any ingenuous mind to reſiſt. *Put on therefore, as the elect of God, bowels of mercies, kindneſs, humbleneſs of mind, meekneſs, long-ſuffering* (*d*). *Let all bitterneſs, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil ſpeaking, be put away from you, with all malice; and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Chriſt's ſake hath forgiven you* (*e*).

That by this heavenly temper, and the practice of every other Chriſtian virtue, you may render

(*c*) 1 John iv. 11.
(*d*) Col. iii. 12.
(*e*) Epheſ. iv. 31.

your-

yourſelves worthy to obtain, through faith in your Redeemer, the gift of everlaſting life, is the fervent prayer of

Your very ſincere friend,

and faithful ſervant,

LAMBETH,
March 1ſt, 1776.

B. PORTEUS.

P. S. Since this Letter was firſt written, the Author having reſigned the rectory of Lambeth, he begs leave to take this opportunity of expreſſing his moſt earneſt wiſhes for the preſent and future happineſs of all his late pariſhioners. And he entreats them to accept this little tract as a ſmall token of his gratitude for the many acts of friendſhip and civility he has received at their hands during the exerciſe of his miniſterial office amongſt them.

FEB. 10, 1777.

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